

# Open Library

**Open Library** is an online project intended to create "one web page for every book ever published". Created by [Aaron Swartz](#),<sup>[4][5]</sup> [Brewster Kahle](#),<sup>[6]</sup> [Alexis Rossi](#),<sup>[7]</sup> [Anand Chitipothu](#),<sup>[7]</sup> and [Rebecca Malamud](#),<sup>[7]</sup> Open Library is a project of the [Internet Archive](#), a [nonprofit organization](#). It has been funded in part by grants from the [California State Library](#) and the Kahle/Austin Foundation. Open Library provides [online](#) digital copies in multiple formats, created from images of many [public domain](#), [out-of-print](#), and [in-print](#) books.

## Contents

- Book database and digital lending library**
- Technical**
- Book sponsorship program**
- Books for the blind and dyslexic**
- Copyright violation accusations**
- See also**
- References**
- Further reading**
- External links**

## Book database and digital lending library

Its book information is collected from the [Library of Congress](#), other libraries, and [Amazon.com](#), as well as from user contributions through a [wiki-like](#) interface.<sup>[5]</sup> If books are available in digital form, a button labeled "Read" appears next to its catalog listing. Digital copies of the contents of each scanned book are distributed as encrypted e-books (created from images of scanned pages), audiobooks and streaming audio (created from the page images using OCR and text-to-speech software), unencrypted images of full pages from OpenLibrary.org and Archive.org, and APIs for automated downloading of page images.<sup>[8]</sup> Links to where books can be purchased or borrowed are also provided.

There are different entities in the database:

- authors
- works (which are the aggregate of all books with the same title and text)

Open Library	
	LIBRARY
	Open Library homepage in September 2011
<b>Type of site</b>	Digital library index
<b>Available in</b>	English
<b>Revenue</b>	donation
<b>URL</b>	<a href="http://openlibrary.org">openlibrary.org</a> ( <a href="http://openlibrary.org/">http://openlibrary.org/</a> )
<b>Alexa rank</b>	▲ 8,349 (June 2020) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Commercial</b>	no
<b>Registration</b>	free
<b>Launched</b>	2006
<b>Current status</b>	Active
<b>Content license</b>	data: public domain <sup>[2]</sup> source code: AGPLv3 <sup>[3]</sup>

- editions (which are different publications of the corresponding works)

Open Library claims to have over 20 million records in its database.<sup>[9]</sup> Copies of the contents of tens of thousands of modern books have been made available from 150 libraries and publishers for ebook digital lending.<sup>[10]</sup> Other books including in-print and in-copyright books have been scanned from copies in library collections, library discards, and donations, and are also available for lending in digital form.<sup>[11]</sup> In total, the Open Library offers copies of over 1.4 million books for what it calls "digital lending" and critics have called distribution of digital copies.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Technical

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Open Library began in 2006 with Aaron Swartz as the original engineer and leader of the Open Library's technical team.<sup>[4][5]</sup> The project was led by George Oates from April 2009 to December 2011.<sup>[13]</sup> Oates was responsible for a complete site redesign during her tenure.<sup>[14]</sup> In 2015, the project was continued by Giovanni Damiola<sup>[7]</sup> and then Brenton Cheng<sup>[7]</sup> and Mek Karpeles<sup>[7]</sup> in 2016.

The site was redesigned and relaunched in May 2010. Its codebase is on GitHub.<sup>[15]</sup> The site uses Infobase, its own database framework based on PostgreSQL, and Infogami, its own Wiki engine written in Python.<sup>[16]</sup> The source code to the site is published under the GNU Affero General Public License.<sup>[17][3]</sup>

## Book sponsorship program

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In the week of October 21, 2019, the Open Library website introduced a Book Sponsorship (<https://openlibrary.org/sponsorship>) program, which according to Cory Doctorow, "lets you direct a cash donation to pay for the purchase and scanning of any books. In return, you are first in line to check that book out when it is available, and then anyone who holds an Open Library library card can check it out".<sup>[18]</sup> The feature was developed by Mek Karpeles, Tabish Shaikh,<sup>[7]</sup> and other members of the community.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Books for the blind and dyslexic

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The website was relaunched adding ADA compliance and offering over 1 million modern and older books to the print disabled in May 2010<sup>[20]</sup> using the DAISY Digital Talking Book.<sup>[21]</sup> Under certain provisions of United States copyright law, libraries are sometimes able to reproduce copyrighted works in formats accessible to users with disabilities.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

## Copyright violation accusations

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The Open Library has justified its ability to offer full contents of books in digital formats as part of the first-sale doctrine and fair use law.<sup>[24][25]</sup> The Open Library owns a physical copy of each book that they have made available, and thus argue that the lending out of one digital scan of the book in a controlled manner falls within the first-sale doctrine, a practice known as Controlled Digital Lending.<sup>[25]</sup>

Since its launch, the Open Library has been accused of mass copyright violation, via the systematic distribution of copies of in-copyright books, including both in-print and out-of-print books, by numerous groups,<sup>[25]</sup> including the American Authors Guild,<sup>[26]</sup> the British Society of Authors,<sup>[27]</sup> the Australian Society of Authors,<sup>[28]</sup> the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America,<sup>[29]</sup> the US National Writers Union,<sup>[30]</sup> and a coalition of 37 national and international organizations of "writers, translators, photographers, and graphic artists; unions, organizations, and federations representing the creators of works included in published books; book publishers; and reproduction rights and public lending rights organizations".<sup>[31]</sup> The

UK Society of Authors threatened legal action unless the Open Library agreed to cease distribution of copyrighted works by February 1, 2019.<sup>[32]</sup> Individual authors reported that Open Library had ignored multiple DMCA takedown notices until after they made a fuss on the Internet Archive blog.<sup>[33]</sup>

The Open Library further came under criticism from several groups representing writers and publishers when it created the National Emergency Library in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The National Emergency Library removed the waitlists of all books in its Open Library collection and allowed any number of digital copies of a book to be downloaded as an encrypted file that would be unusable after two weeks, asserting that this unlimited borrowing was a reasonable exception under the national emergency to allow educational functions to continue since physical libraries and bookstores were forced to be shuttered.<sup>[25]</sup> The Authors Guild, the Association of American Publishers, the National Writers Union, and others argued that this allowed unlimited copyright infringement and denied revenues from distribution of authorized digital copies of books to authors who also needed relief during the COVID-19 national emergency.<sup>[25]</sup> Though the Open Library asserted that the copies of entire books in ebook format were still encrypted and the unlimited borrowing was for educational purposes, the National Writers Union asserted that images of each page of each book could still be accessed on the Web without encryption or other controls.<sup>[8][34]</sup>

Four major publishers—Hachette, Penguin Random House, John Wiley & Sons, and HarperCollins, all members of the Association of American Publishers—filed a lawsuit in the Southern New York Federal District Court against the Internet Archive in June 2020, asserting the Open Library project violated numerous copyrights. In their suit, the publishers claimed "Without any license or any payment to authors or publishers, [the Internet Archive] scans print books, uploads these illegally scanned books to its servers, and distributes verbatim digital copies of the books in whole via public-facing websites. With just a few clicks, any Internet-connected user can download complete digital copies of in-copyright books from [the] defendant."<sup>[35]</sup> The publishers are represented by the law firms Davis Wright Tremaine and Oppenheim + Zebrak.<sup>[36]</sup> In wake of the lawsuit, the Internet Archive ended the National Emergency Library on June 16, 2020 instead of the intended June 30 date, and requested the publishers to "call off their costly assault".<sup>[37]</sup>

## See also

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- Free Software licensing
- Google Books
- LibraryThing
- List of AGPL web applications
- List of digital library projects
- Online Public Access Catalog
- WorldCat

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## Further reading

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## External links

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- Official website (<https://openlibrary.org/>)
-  *The Open Library* ([https://librivox.org/search?title=The+Open+Library&author=Kahle&reader=&keywords=&genre\\_id=0&status=all&project\\_type=either&recorded\\_language=&sort\\_order=catalog\\_date&search\\_page=1&search\\_form=advanced](https://librivox.org/search?title=The+Open+Library&author=Kahle&reader=&keywords=&genre_id=0&status=all&project_type=either&recorded_language=&sort_order=catalog_date&search_page=1&search_form=advanced)) public domain audiobook at *LibriVox* (Text of the speech given by Brewster Kahle, founder of the Internet Archive, at the launch of the Open Library in October 2005)

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